

## **10 Ways the VA is Serving our Vets - and More**

President Obama charged Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Ric Shinseki with building a 21st century VA. Here's what VA is doing to serve our vets:

1. It's easier for about 200,000 Vietnam veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange to get the health care and benefits they need.
2. Co-pays for the catastrophically disabled have been eliminated and the half-million Priority 8 veterans will have their VA health care access restored.
3. Funding for veterans health care across the board has dramatically increased – this includes improving care for rural veterans and women veterans.
4. Funding delays for veterans medical care are over. VA is working overtime to create a single lifetime electronic record that our troops and veterans can keep for life.
5. VA is hiring thousands of new claims processors to break the backlog once and for all and, for the first time ever, veterans will be able to go to the VA website and download their personal health records with one simple click. It will also be easier for vets to check on the status of their claims online or even from their cell phones.
6. Today, there are about 20,000 fewer homeless veterans than there were before this Administration took office. We're not stopping until every veteran who has fought for America has a home in America.
7. The newest veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq will have the support and counseling they need to transition back to civilian life. This includes funding the post-9/11 GI Bill, which is already helping nearly 300,000 veterans and family members pursue their dream of a college education.
8. VA is helping with job training and placement for veterans trying to find work in a tough economy.
9. Unprecedented resources are being directed to treat the wounds of today's wars -- traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress disorder. The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act not only improves treatment for traumatic brain injury and PTSD, it gives new support to the caregivers who put their own lives on hold to care for their loved one.
10. The Administration is making it easier for those suffering from PTSD to qualify for VA benefits. A veteran can now establish a claim based on his or her own testimony of events that caused PTSD without the requirement of corroborating evidence -- no matter what war you served in.

We salute and honor the men and women in uniform and their families back home. To learn more about VA's commitment, read the Q and A below.

### **What is VA doing to reduce the size of the claims backlog and help Veterans to access their benefits more quickly?**

- By 2015, Veterans, dependents and survivors will not wait more than 125 days for a decision on their claim and that claims will be processed with 98-percent accuracy rate.
- VA has expanded its workforce in the Veterans Benefits Administration by over 3,500 people, has begun accepting on-line applications for initial disability benefits, initiated an innovation competition, launched over 30 pilot programs and initiatives to identify best practices, and invested over \$138 million in a paperless Veterans Benefits Management System that will be deployed in Fiscal Year 2012.
- Additionally, VBA has awarded a \$9 million contract to "fast track" Veterans' claims for service-connected illnesses associated with Agent Orange herbicide exposure during the Vietnam War.

### **How is VA helping separating Service members transition from DoD to VA?**

- VA is working with DOD on the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record Initiative and is making steady progress.
- VA expanded its Benefits Delivery at Discharge program and established a "Quick Start" program to expedite benefits processing for separating Service members.
- In 2009, the Disability Evaluation System pilot program expanded to 27 sites. At these sites, VA and DoD use a single separation examination and rating for separating Service members in lieu of two separate examinations usually required of our outgoing military, dramatically reducing processing time.

### **What has VA done to help Veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress?**

- VA increased its exceptional mental health programs budget and hired more than 1,000 additional mental health professionals in 2009 to meet the important need for mental health screenings and treatment.
- This July, VA published a rule to relax the requirement for evidence of proof for Veterans who pursue a claim for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Physician veterans can now establish a claim based on his or her own testimony of events that caused PTSD without the requirement for corroborating evidence.
- For Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), a new disability rating system was fielded to greatly improve how claims are evaluated.

- Additionally, the Veterans National Suicide Prevention Hotline (1-800-273-TALK) has received more than 293,000 calls and interrupted more than 10,000 potential suicides since it began in 2008.
- Over 150 professional staff monitor the lines 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, to ensure any Service member, Veteran or family member in crisis can talk to someone who can help.
- In 2009, VA expanded the Hotline to include a Suicide Prevention Chat Room ([www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)), where Service members and Veterans can use the Web to seek assistance.

### **What is the administration doing to improve employment options for veterans?**

- The Secretaries of VA and Labor are co-chairing the first Intergovernmental Council on Veterans Employment, working with the Office of Personnel Management to reform federal hiring practices in order to expand Veteran employment opportunities. What has VA done for those exposed to Agent Orange?
- VA established a presumptive service connection for Vietnam Veterans exposed to herbicides, including Agent Orange, with hairy-cell leukemia and other chronic B-cell leukemias, Parkinson's disease, and ischemic heart disease.
- About 200,000 Veterans have already been identified as potentially eligible for disability compensation.
- VA has also awarded a \$9 million contract to "fast track" Veterans' claims for service-connected illnesses associated with Agent Orange herbicide exposure during the Vietnam War.

### **What is VA doing to improve access to health care for Veterans living in rural areas?**

- VA is working to improve access to health care for Veterans living in rural areas by recruiting and retaining medical professionals with the requisite expertise to provide the world class care our Veterans have earned, they're improving the availability of education and training for those serving rural Veterans, and optimizing the use of emerging technologies and research.
- VA awarded over \$200 million in rural health projects in 2009.
- In FY 2010, an additional \$250 million was allocated to support rural outpatient clinic development, fee-basis care and clinical programs.
- Important rural health initiatives planned or underway include mobile clinics, home-based primary care, tele-health expansion, mental health services and education and training to best serve our nation's Veterans living in rural or highly rural areas.

### **What is VA doing to better serve Women Veterans?**

- VA knows that women make up 15 percent of today's military, and that the population of women Veterans using VA is increasing at a rapid pace.
- VA is evaluating and expanding care for all women Veterans. The Veterans Health Administration has provided comprehensive multi-residency training to over 500 providers in women's health.
- By 2013, VA will have implemented comprehensive primary care for women Veterans at all facilities.
- VA employs full-time Women Veterans Program Managers at 144 health systems.
- VA has also expanded outreach programs for women Veterans, with local and national health conferences and forums, active web communications, local information initiatives such as posters and newsletters, and a proactive Women Veterans Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.
- Most recently, VA held a Forum for Women Veterans and advocates for Women Veterans at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington on 28 July.

### **What is VA doing to end Veteran homelessness?**

- VA's intense campaign to end Veteran homelessness in five years has secured broad support at federal, state and local levels in both the public and private sectors.
- This campaign is centered around:
  - Outreach and education to Veterans who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless;
  - The strategy of prevention—controlling growth, even as VA reduces the homeless population;
  - Strengthening the availability of primary, specialty, and mental health care, including substance-use disorders—which is why VA is opening five new domiciliary residential programs to assure access to treatment;
  - Increased housing opportunities and appropriate supportive services tailored to the homeless Veteran;
  - Greater financial and employment support as well as improved benefits delivery—everything from increasing the number of Veterans working in the federal government, to improved placement of Veterans in private sector jobs, to growing the number of high-performing Veteran-owned and service-disabled Veteran-owned small businesses competing for government contracts.
  - And finally, expansion of these critically-important community partnerships.
- The Obama Administration and Congress have joined VA in their commitment with the necessary funds; VA invested nearly \$400 million in 2009 to serve over 35,000 Veterans and more than 5,000 spouses and

children through outreach initiatives, a 15 percent increase from the previous year.

- More than 8,300 Veterans are in permanent housing with dedicated case managers and access to high-quality VA health care.
- In 2010, VA is allocating \$39 million to fund 2,200 new transitional housing beds through grants to local providers.
- To better understand the causes of homelessness and coordinate efforts to end it, VA organized many collaborative events including the National Summit on Veteran Homelessness in November 2009, with more than 1,200 attendees from across federal, state and local levels in both the public and private sectors.